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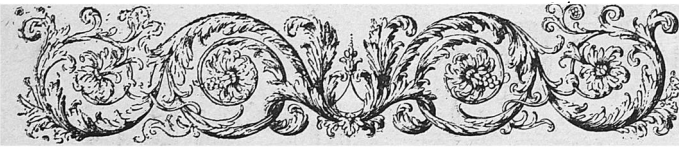
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THE DECORATION OF CITY HOUSES.

BY RALPH A. CRAM.

INTRODUCTION.

IT was distinctly the fault of the age that when at last a few advanced men saw with a kind of horror the artistic degradation that, ten years ago and less, had come upon the people of the civilized world, and therefore taunting civilization with its barbarity, demanded in the name of honor a wider reaching of art and a truer reading of its nature. So it was, indeed, and the record of the first five years subsequent to the Centennial Exposition, so far as matters of art were concerned, gave good ground for holding that then at least no consistent and national art was possible in the United States. The history of the so-called "art-revival" of the past decade is, in its reasons and results, a subject of peculiar interest, fascinating also, but not the object of this projected series of papers. It is named here only in so far as it was the cause of a natural but insidious public delusion, which vitiated fundamentally all the work which followed—the idea that art was fashion or fashion was art, for the two were inextricably mixed—the idea that what was sanctioned by fashion (what fashion was never asked) was for the time being the only perfect thing, and that one fixed scheme of decoration—color, form and arrangement—was equally suited to the house of a clergyman and a stock broker, a philosopher and a lawyer, a poet and a pork-packer.

So flagrant and preposterous an error was possible only in an era of total artistic depravity, such as then was. Coming at that time it was the only possible logical outgrowth of the giving of art ideas to a people mentally unfitted. The error has still remained in this direction, although more knowledge has come in the matter of the technical qualities of art decoration. There is good knowledge growing of intrinsic beauty in line, color and arrangement, but still is individuality lacking—in fact, the vital reason of art. The explanation is evident, if harsh and unhonorable. Given a true desire of art, and the error would never exist; given a knowledge of even the first principles of art, a consciousness of the theory of beauty and the truth of beauty, these things would never have been. It is solely because the people as a whole—east of the Atlantic as well as west, for the popular reception of revealed art has been in England to the full as clumsy and unreasoning as was the case in America—were fundamentally ignorant of the nature of beauty and of the laws which govern art as well as the nature of art itself. Hardly can this now be said, for although is still wanting knowledge of the intrinsic value of art, its technical qualities and the laws which govern them are swiftly becoming recognized and consistently followed.

That the public believes that carpets and wall-paper of floriated designs, haircloth, veneering, gilded furniture, crude colors and white, are in decoration vulgarities, is much, but it is greatly to be feared that the public has no cogent reasons for hating a parlor of ten years ago, save that it is unfashionable, and they have been told that it is inartistic. These are the men and women who, if fashion directed, would fill their rooms with Georgian furniture, decorate their houses in the rococo or baroque styles, love Louis Sieze, and believe the eighteenth century generally to be the climax of perfection.

Nothing else than this very exotic version of art was reasonably to have been expected. We must quietly confess that at the time of the Centennial Exhibition we were absolutely and barbarously ignorant of art. The honor is the greater to us now that we can say, that there is in the mass of our industrial art work a creditable showing of true art feeling, that is—considering the length of time we have worked—actually unexampled in the history of intellectual development.

It is known now for an immutable fact that art is in no way amenable to fashion; that its laws are permanent, that what is good to-day will be good to-morrow, that what was bad yesterday can by no means be good to-day; that color may be good and bad intrinsically; thus also of line and form. These things being known for truths, it remains for us to grow wise in the knowledge of truths of beauty and learned in the reasons of

art, that we may do good work in decoration and work that will last, as have lasted the work of the golden times of Pericles, Giotto and St. Louis. But there is a stranger thing yet that we must learn, the lesson that all lore that we may use in these things—fair color, sweet lines and goodly forms, and the harmonious grouping of these—will avail us nothing so long as we lack the power to thoughtfully apply them. First must we know, and fully, that *art is the expression of the higher life of a people*. Moreover, that as the life, so the art: the Parthenon being a Hellene, the Sainte Chapelle a Goth, unchangeable, and as though a Goth or a Hellene stood here with us. And even so with the individual. Until we learn never to copy the work of a dead age and nation, taking it to ourselves, until we learn that the home of one man must be individual, must be himself—until we know firmly these things we may never have lasting and honorable art. Indeed it may be said that the consciousness of the intellectual value of art and its technical qualities must grow together, since knowledge of one compels knowledge of the other; understanding of the laws of beauty creates an understanding of its higher possibilities.

This is the reason of this long prelude to what might seem a most simple matter, the decoration of a city house. In point of fact, without it, such a series of papers could not justly be written, much less could drawings be made showing schemes possibly desirable, for no two houses should be in the slightest degree alike, either in arrangement, style of decoration, harmony or contrasts of color, nature of prevailing lines, general tone, atmosphere or final effect; only alike in the very broadest principles governing decorative art, and this of complete individuality the strongest of all. The house *must* disclose the inmate. Not only must it be nicely calculated to harmonize with the spirit of the occupant, gloomy if he is sad, thoughtful if he is grave, merry if he is gay, that he may best find this portion of his outer life in unison with that within, but the visitor must feel the personality of the dweller the moment he passes the threshold. Rossetti lived in a cavern of solemn and brooding gloom, hopeless and unbroken; Whistler designs peacock rooms and arrangements in yellow and white. Both were men of individuality, and their houses marked them well. This must we do also, for there are surely some who have separate personalities, some who can think for themselves, who know that fashion is another name for farcical folly, and that its followers frankly admit in their following that they cannot think for themselves; surely there are those who will choose such books as they love for their library, such pictures as they love for their walls, whatever might be the edict of fashion, should it finally seize upon these things as its own. Choosing these, why not choose the decoration of the house, almost as important a matter? If the leaders of society favor Louis Quinze furniture, why should all others? Furnish consistently in Directory style, or Jacobean, or Colonial, anything, so long as it suits best the temper and taste of the inmates of the house. To this we must come, if we have any art or possibility of art within us.

Now, therefore, it is very hard to prepare a series of designs and essays on the decoration of city houses, since very nearly everything depends upon the taste and likings of the occupant. It is true that the majority of householders lack sufficient knowledge of art to choose between a Turner or a Teniers, a Venice glass or a modern cut-glass pitcher (that supremely artistic design consisting of endless faceted crystals), between peacock blue and magenta, the outline of a Doric capital or a Renaissance pediment. With this class of people we have nothing whatever to do; they have no right to art, and any attempt to teach them the rudiments of beauty would be ludicrously ineffectual. Let us leave them to their French and German Renaissance, their gilded chairs, upholstered in blue satin, their white velvet carpets, cut-glass chandeliers, pier-glasses and lace curtains. They would but blunderingly work with the artistic generalities which apply to every house, and with the individual details they would make sad devastation. They are artistically hopeless, and we must depend upon the next generation. With these worthy and useful people we need not trouble ourselves, we have to do only with those who have the capacity for taking in all they meet with, thoroughly assimilating it, and then recreating something that is wholly their own, something that is individual. The simple laws governing decoration are quite sufficiently

easy to enunciate, for mostly they already are known. Nothing new can be said of art work, for the principles are fixed, they may only be shown in a newer light, and repeated and re-repeated incessantly. These are the only things that may be told, as a boy may be taught to draw purely a flower or a Greek curve, to lay his paint with direction and definition, and to see the virtue in Greek art and Florentine and Venetian art, and the corresponding evil in Roman and modern German, French, English and American art. It remains for him to co-ordinate these teachings and to use them to a noble end. He may win or he may fail, it rests with him.

THE VESTIBULE.

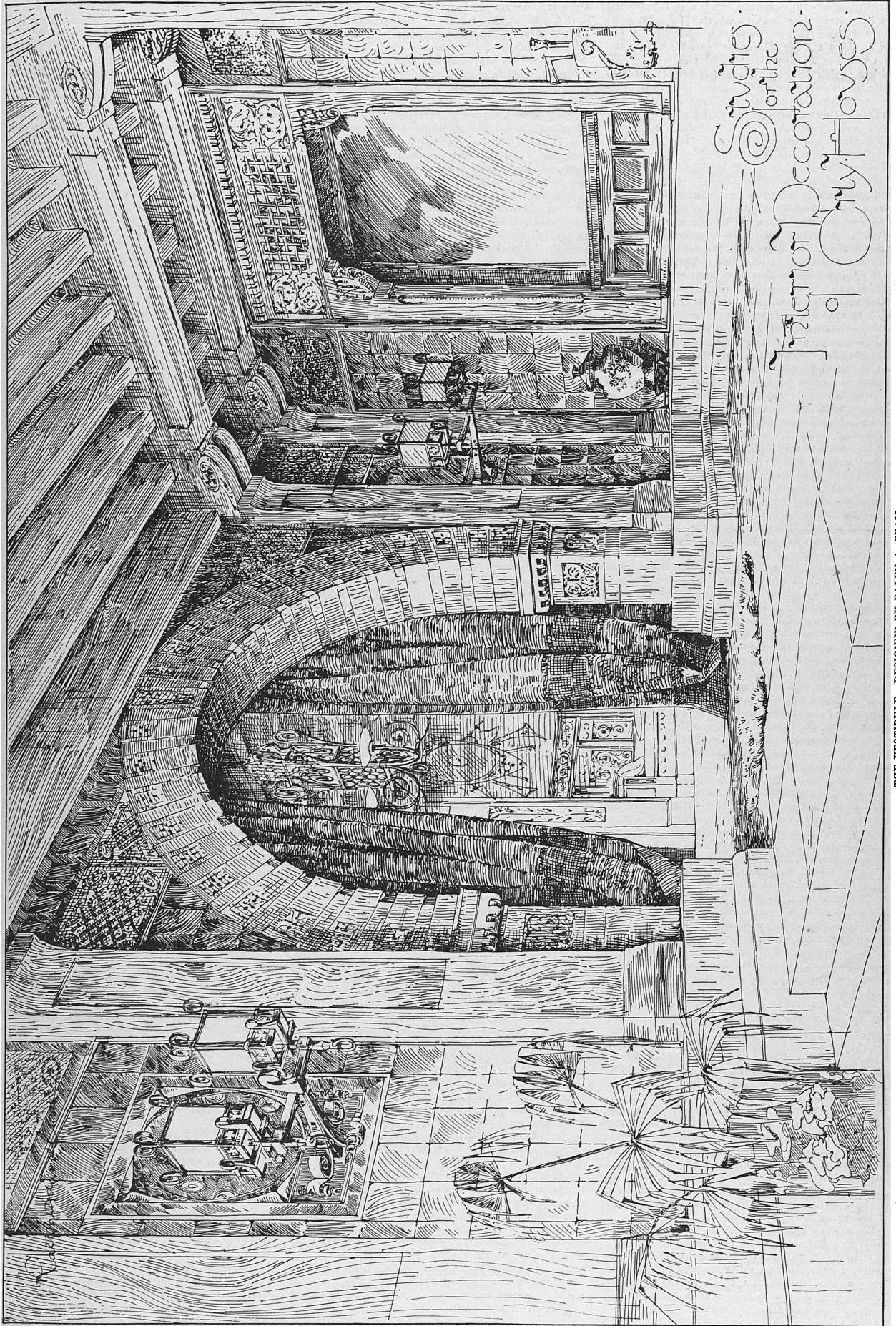
Happily it is now no longer necessary to plead for public recognition of the utilitarian and esthetic importance of the vestibule. The determined and forcible revolution of some five years ago resulted in awakening the naturally artistic to a partial knowledge of the power of beauty, and in convincing those to whom art was by nature as a sealed book, that if they would hold position in general estimation with those of natural nobility and refinement, they must follow them implicitly in the matter of art. Therefore the recognition of the organic nature of a house and of the laws governing its decoration, has been to a great extent accepted by the civilized section of the people, and the need is now no longer inevitable for the inveighing against the countless barbarities and absurdities which ten years ago were all that we knew touching the matter of decorative art.

Those Dark Ages of beauty, when tunnel-like entries, double parlors, white velvet carpets, white ceilings, white and gold paper, and blue satin furniture were the accepted materials of decoration, are gone—let us hope—forever. We know now by reason of the artistic revival in England, how very dark and hopeless those ages were, and although in our tumultuous striving after nobler things we are constantly guilty of egregious mistakes, still the most preposterous errors are on the part of those who, mentally, remain yet in the Dark Ages, those who follow art for its fashion, and the consciousness of our past error remains firm; we err only in not yet clearly seeing the direction of improvement. Our labor now is to find out distinctly and clearly just what beauty really is, to discover, if we may, its laws and learn their application. We know our error, but we still lack the knowledge of the direction of right.

It will, therefore, in no wise be necessary to declaim violently against the old-time (yet was it so very old?) barbarities; they are dead. Only to suggest what seem now to be steps toward a truer state of affairs, to note what seem now to be possible laws touching the application of beauty. What the essential nature of beauty is we do not know, and it would be futile to ask. We do know, however, that it is something fixed; that there is accounting for tastes, distinctly. That one man's judgment touching what is beautiful is *not* as good as another's. This thing we have had to accept, although unwillingly: it was borne in upon us with a directness of power there was no gainsaying. We know now that Greek and thirteenth to sixteenth century Gothic art are good, and that Roman, Pompeian and Renaissance art are truly not art, but bad. Now, until we have sufficient knowledge to establish a permanent criterion for the judgment of all that which lays claim to the name of art, until we know the secret of beauty and the intrinsic meaning of art, we must be content, accepting pure Greek and Gothic as the noblest art thus far, to bring all things to them, judging them so, calling that good which violates none of the inferred canons of the art of these two ages, and calling that distinctly bad which is related in any way to the corrupt art of Rome and the Renaissance. It is the custom to consider Greek and Gothic art as opposed violently to each other, but the inference is wholly superficial and false. The two arts hold precisely the same relation to each other as do Beethoven and Wagner. It is only the superficial who find an antagonism between them. The subject is of peculiar interest, but bears not at all on the question in hand, and, therefore, claiming now no attention.

In this way, then, must we judge of beauty itself. The first law governing the application of beauty to decoration has already been expressed: that the house must be the man, unequivocally; his personality entering into it and giving it life. The other laws we will note in their places. Let us come now to the consideration of the true subject of this paper: the vestibule.

In the decoration of a room three considerations, in addition to the primal law of art, govern the arrangement. They are these: the logical relation of the room to the rest of the house and



Studies
of the
Interior Decoration
of
Chapel Houses.

THE VESTIBULE. DESIGNED BY RALPH A. CRAM.

to the entire composition; the purpose of the room, whether or no for permanent occupancy and that in the day or the evening, and the intellectual associations of the room and the impression it should convey to the permanent inmate or the casual visitor. By the first consideration the room is made an organic part of the whole, harmonizing with those rooms which join it, and exerting a pleasing influence upon the individual passing through it, the result being not a heterogeneous gathering of disconnected parts but a harmonious composition. To a certain extent this consideration governs the much disputed question of style, as will hereafter be seen. By the aid of the second consideration is determined the nature of the decoration, whether it shall be rude or refined, powerfully effective or sensitively delicate, symbolical or realistic; also, to a certain extent the color, whether it shall be warm or cold, exciting or quieting. To this consideration is referred much of the matter of the accessories, such as works of art, bric-à-brac, etc. The third is the most vital and important consideration of all, and precisely the one most often utterly disregarded. Quite naturally, since, until of late years, the quality of "mentality"—intellectual or spiritual suggestions—has been never so much as suggested as a quality of art, and even now it is almost universally denied. Refusing for the once to admit the rule of the majority, it is asserted as a law of art decoration as well as of pictorial art that the mental suggestiveness and character of a scheme of decoration is a consideration second only to that of individuality. We may design a room which may violate no law of technical art, but unless is breathed into it the personality of the inmate, the room will be lifeless, and unless is given to this the additional quality of mental suggestiveness, the room will be without a soul. The practical working of this principle may be demonstrated further on. These three considerations, then, are those upon which depends the truly artistic success of a scheme of decoration. Let us examine their practical application.

Logically, the vestibule is the transition from the outer air to the private life within; therefore, must it be to a great extent architectural in its decoration, strongly of the character of the exterior of the house, repeating, or rather recalling the details and ornaments of the exterior, refined, of course, to furnish an easy transition from the rigor and solidity of exterior work to the domestic delicacy of that of the interior. Yet must it be unobtrusive, although striking distinctly the keynote of the decoration of the house. While giving a plain suggestion of what will be the character of the decoration of the remainder of the house, it must never be so pronounced either in design or color as to be more noticeable than the hall and the living rooms. To a visitor, a progress from the street to the drawing-room must be a well-modulated transition, the culmination being reached in the principal room of entertainment. This is the teaching of the first consideration; and that of the second is this: Since the vestibule is a passage, a transition, no one resting sufficiently long in it to note in detail any of the ornaments, this should be wholly of a kind sufficiently bold to strike the passing attention, neither delicate nor possessing of necessity great beauty, but strong, powerful and well emphasized. The design must be simple and direct and formed of strong parts, plainly constructional. Here let us settle once for all the matter of rudeness and perfection in decoration. It has become an arbitrary fashion to affect the clumsy workmanship of some centuries ago, to copy the defects in a work as well as the merits. This system, which demands condemnation almost too strong for language, is quite logically the outgrowth of the present art craze. Now, there is absolutely nothing which will pardon, voluntarily, bad work. If there is carving in a house, it must be as perfect as possible; it may be bold and coarse, but it shall not be clumsy or incompetent, since this is the veriest vanity and affectation. In the vestibule, therefore, let the carving, if there be any, be simple, bold, and strong, but never rude, careless, or ignorant; let the timbers be solid and as smooth as planing will make them, never rough-hewn; and let the workmanship throughout be the best obtainable from the most competent workmen. It is, of course, obvious that, in what is really a passage, pictures and objects of art are quite out of place. Anything demanding more than a cursory glance not belonging here at all.

With regard now to the mentally suggestive qualities of the decoration of this room. The inquiry divides itself into two considerations: the scheme of decoration as affecting the mind of the visitor, and as it gives him a first feeling of the individuality of the occupant of the house. With the second consideration we have nothing to do; each man must give his own personality to his house. With the first consideration we have everything to do. Manifestly, the first impression that

a vestibule should convey is that of shelter, of protection, quiet, homeliness, warmth; this last always, since it is assumed that the man who has the desire for beauty and the means to gratify it, will never remain in the city after the middle of May or return to his house before the middle of October. A city house is primarily for winter use, therefore, no consideration, whatever, will be taken of its possibilities as a summer residence. First, then, a vestibule must have warmth and shelter; then almost equally silence, repose and shade. It is impossible to give rules for the attainment of these qualities, yet they are the ones which are absolutely indispensable. Warm, glowing colors in rich combinations, strong, simple lines, a ceiling that is rather low and heavy, and thick curtains, are details that, if carefully used, will result well. But it demands personal feeling for the perfection of a scheme of decoration, and rules and systems will avail nothing unless guided and co-ordinated by the artistic feeling of the decorator.

The plate accompanying this article by no means fulfills all of the requirements of a vestibule, nor any of them satisfactorily, but it may serve to give some hints as to possible methods. The feeling of repose is absent, but there is something of solidity, breadth and simplicity, with the effect of shelter and considerable warmth in the coloring. It is entered from a deep outer porch ten feet square, large enough to step boldly into with open umbrellas on a rainy day. By this arrangement, the vestibule—made very low—extends beyond the reception-room, and thus the entrance to the hall is obtained from the side, an arrangement far preferable to that of the door directly facing the main entrance, in place of which is a large mirror in a shadowed alcove; beneath is a broad ledge for hats. It is of course unnecessary to state that a hat-tree is a monstrosity allowable only in a boarding-house. The floor is of dark-red slate, and quite around the room runs a ledge a foot wide, and of the same height, of the same material. The walls are covered with plain red tiles, surmounted by a frieze of coarse mosaic, gold, tawny fawn color, and deep peacock blue. The woodwork is of quartered oak stained a deep golden olive, of the same tone as the stone and tiles. The curtains closing the arch to the hall are of a heavy silky material like uncut velvet, rosy and golden olive in color and slightly lighter in tone than the wood, the embroidery is deep peacock-blue and gold. The gas brackets are of wrought-iron, dull and polished, with discs of beaten copper and brass inserted in the tablet attached to the wall. A jar of black bronze, a dark-green palm by the door, and a Japanese vase of intense blue-green cloisonné complete the composition. The colors are nearly all of the same value and toned down to an unobtrusive duskiness, the portières in the great arch glowing with luminous green and gold, drawing attention at once to the important center of the composition.

EXHIBITION OF THE WORKS OF HENRY MOSLER.

FOR the last half-dozen years Mr. Henry Mosler has been one of the conspicuous American artists abroad. His artistic reputation has been signally distinguished by the purchase of one of his canvases "Le Retour" for the Luxembourg Gallery by the French government. An American who, in any walk in life, receives the mark of national approval from a foreign government, lays his countrymen under tribute in a way, for the good in a measure all share. Every one must realize this in confronting Mr. Mosler's picture, honored among the honored in the gallery of the Luxembourg. At home Mr. Mosler is better known as the recipient of one of the four prizes given at the Prize Fund Exhibition last spring for his painting, "The Last Sacrament," which is now the property of the Louisville Polytechnic Institution. Another painting from the Salon of 1883, "The Wedding Morning," belongs to the Museum of Fine Arts, at Sydney, New South Wales, and another "A Rainy Day," has a place in the Temple collection, belonging to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

It will be seen that the paintings of Mr. Mosler have been exceptionally fortunate in finding public recognition, and these facts alone give to any comprehensive exhibition of his works certain interest. The collection on exhibition fills the south room of the Academy of Design, and consists of works in oil, water color, and sketches in black and white. The greater number of these refer to Brittany, which has given to the artist the material for his greatest triumphs, and make a very good exposition of Breton life and character. There is no cranny of the Breton interior that he has not explored with his brush, and very interesting artistic properties these studies make. To these the

subjects of the paintings owe a debt of gratitude, for more picturesque setting they could scarcely have. But it would be unjust to leave any implication that the success of the paintings depends on the accessories, however finely they are put on the canvas. Mr. Mosler's studies of the Breton character have been as thorough, and he has brought all his artistic training to presenting it. His subjects are those of incident and anecdote, and interesting also from that point of view. He sees the humors of Breton life, but in no hilarious fashion. He is straightforward in his narration, and sets down its tragedies without excess of language. This might be taken for lack of feeling, if one did not remember the prostrate figure in "Le Retour," and the figure of the woman in "The Last Sacrament," each eloquent of grief and expressed in the most difficult manner. In mere sentiment Mr. Mosler is by no means as successful.

The principal works in the present exhibition are "The Visit of the Marquise," intended for the next Salon, as yet unfinished, and "The Harvest Dance;" the latter is an out-of-door scene, with sunlight flickering through the trees, and striking in composition; "The Return of the Shrimpers," "The Widow," "The Eve of Battle." Many of the smaller canvases are studies for the larger well-known works. And those who are interested in seeing how artists arrive at success, must be interested in these studies and especially in the pencil sketches of groups and single figures.

M. G. H.

A CHURCH TRANSFORMED.

DAILY passengers on one of the busiest car lines in the city of Brooklyn have watched for several weeks past the gradual change of a squat, square, dull-looking edifice into a noble church whose high towers are perhaps the most striking of all that rear themselves above the roofs of the city of homes and churches. This is the Church of the Messiah. Perhaps it was because the Catholics were building, across the street, a substantial granite palace for their Bishop, that shamed the uninteresting temple, and perhaps it was because of a real spirit of progress that the society determined to remodel the structure. At all events, it is now a picturesque example of Romanesque architecture, and is as beautiful within as without. For suggestion sake, as showing how far it is possible to improve on ill-conditioned things, it may be worth while to allude to a few points in the alteration of this church. The original structure was square and heavy, with arched windows that precluded the use of the Gothic, and was painted a lifeless brown-pink. Terra-cotta has entered largely into the exterior adornment, for the entire façade has been sheathed with it. At the outer corner of the front stands a tower 180 feet high, rising squarely from the ground, but narrowing and flattening its angles as it ascends. A sheaf of closely-set columns supports a conical roof, and on each of the faces of the tower, about 120 feet above the street, is a strong relief representing one of the beasts of the Apocalypse. From the other corner rises a square tower, less in height but wider, and capped by a hip-roof carried on slender columns. The original brick in the lower part of the towers and front gable has been painted to conform with the tint of the terra-cotta, so that the whole front is not less noticeable for its form than for its brightness of color. A porch, of terra-cotta likewise, has been thrown out between the towers and gives a rich and imposing effect to the front. It is thirty feet long, thirteen feet high, and about ten feet deep. A flame, typifying the Holy Ghost, is displayed on the front of it, and two lions, seated on their haunches and facing each other, are placed beside the apex. Above the porch is a new rose window, and one or two of the smaller windows, that were square before, have been capped with new arches of terra-cotta in order to preserve the rounded Romanesque form. An expensive lamp hanging beneath the porch will guide worshippers to the entrance, and a chime of bells will denote the hour of service.

Inside, a number of memorial windows have been added, so that the interior is aglow with soft and luminous color. Several of them are painted with representations of Biblical scenes. The walls have been enlivened with new frescoing, and above the altar hangs a large copy of Bouguereau's "Adoration," painted on metal in vitreous colors so strong as to be plainly discernible from the entrance. It is framed in velvet. Beneath it are three plaques of copper repoussé, set in a frame of mahogany, and representing scenes in the life and death of Christ. Portières have replaced doors, marble flooring replaces wood, a large scarf of Japanese silk hangs across the chancel, the new chancel rail and pulpit are of brass, and the effect is one of repose and richness.